

## The Journal of William Robson (1797-1881)

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A volume, containing 180 pages of typing, has been presented to the Reference Library. It is a copy of the Journal of William Robson (1797-1881), of Darlington and Sunderland, and later of Stockton, co. Durham, son of Nathan Robson and Rachel Brady. He was educated at Ackworth and then apprenticed at Sunderland to a mercer and shipowner. He became a mercer at Darlington, married Rachel Hutchinson (1792-1868) in 1821 and had five sons and one daughter. He was an Elder. The Journal is very full for the period covered—1 mo. 1, 1817 to 5 mo. 6, 1818. The copy is prefaced by Joseph J. Green, dated 19 iii. 1897.

A large percentage of the entries refers to visits to uncles, aunts and cousins with whom he appears to have been well provided, but at intervals we find notes of the books he read—"Memoirs of Agrippina, the Wife of Germanicus"; Robertson's "History of Charles V," 4 vols.; life of Anthony Benezet; Ussher's "Letters"; "History of the Reign of Catherine 2nd, Empress of Russia." Meetings for Worship and for Discipline received frequent notice and the ministry in the former referred to and sometimes the sermons are reported. Visiting Ministers include Mabel Hipsley and Hannah Broadhead (p. 15), Barbara Hoyland (p. 78), Sarah Abbot and Sarah Hustler (p. 91), Hannah Field of New York, and Elizabeth Fry (spinster) (pp. 122, 124).

This was the day of the woman Minister. Of the local preachers Elizabeth Robson (1771-1843)<sup>1</sup> was the most prominent. Her "appearances" were very frequent. "My Aunt E. R. was engaged twice<sup>2</sup> in testimony, and once in supplication—in the former of which she was engaged in an extraordinary manner, to sound an alarm to the lukewarm and negligent ones" (p. 16); "My Aunt Margaret appeared in supplication, my aunt E. R. and Thomas Richardson<sup>3</sup> each twice in testimony" (p. 33). "Mary Brantingham<sup>4</sup> appeared in testimony twice, in which she was engaged to admonish the youth, whom she desired might remember their Creator in the day of their youth that if they were permitted to live until old age, He might not depart from them. I think poor Mary seems to be failing fast, her sentences are often quite unconnected, and she quotes Scripture passages incorrectly" (p. 106). On one Sunday towards the end of 1817, H. Field and E. Fry both spoke and the former prayed. E. Robson also "appeared." After tea at Thomas Robson's some Friends gathered in, when "a great deal of excellent advice was handed," all three again preaching and later H. Field addressed several in the company individually. On the occasion of a funeral Margaret Bragg<sup>5</sup> "could not bring to mind one passage of scripture of a consolatory nature" till she thought of and repeated the words: "Can the Ethiopian change his skin? etc." Solomon Chapman<sup>6</sup> was among the few men Ministers in Sunderland Meeting at that time.

On 6 mo. 28 we are informed that Frederick Smith<sup>7</sup> and his family had arrived in Darlington to open a school, "to the no small dissatisfaction

of Joseph Sams " (pp. 33, 55)<sup>8</sup>. Towards the end of the year our Diarist " drank tea at cousin Fredk Smiths. . . . I think he and Cousin Selfe are quite an acquisition to the Society at Darlington. They have now got 9 boarders " (p. 115). Joseph Sams (whose wife was " Cousin Mary ") was not approved of by the Friends of his Meeting. His wife and he called on the Diarist's Mother during her illness. " Cousin Mary " was invited upstairs but not Joseph, though " he desired to be present at the interview as he was afraid he would be the subject of conversation upstairs, if he did not accompany his wife." Nathan Robson took Joseph to task downstairs, and our Diarist, " having the curiosity to hear their conversation and listening at the door," tells us what transpired! (pp. 144, 145).

Further entries :

" 2 mo. 12. 1817. This evening at 10 o'clock the extensive manufactory belonging to E. and J. Pease of Darlington was discovered to be on fire and in a few hours was destroyed, happily no lives were lost."

" 2 mo. 13. This day was appointed the first for the exchange of the new for the old silver coinage throughout the Kingdom."

" Took a pipe with T[homas] Robson and D[earman] Robson "—the only reference to smoking noticed.

" 5 mo. 2. The Meeting at Darlington has of late years very much decreased and in all probability will be still less. Many have been removed by death and others by marriage." Years later the Meeting greatly increased.

" 6 mo. 8. Heard of the forgery committed on Backhouse's Bank, but they having apprehended the delinquents before they have had time to circulate many of the notes (Darlington 5 £s), it is hoped no serious consequences to the Bank will ensue."

There are notices of Daniel Wheeler ; and a copy of a letter, " dated from on board the *Loft* on his passage to Petersburg," appears under 7 mo. 31 (pp. 50, 71).

" 8 mo. 13. Gathered from Uncle Thomas Robson considerable information respecting the ancestors of my family. . . . My great grandfather was convinced in Ireland." For an account of " Tommy Robson " see xvi. 46.

#### NOTES.

<sup>1</sup> For Elizabeth Robson see vol. xiv. p. 75.

<sup>2</sup> Ministers not infrequently spoke twice in one meeting, sometimes to expand what had previously been presented, at others introducing fresh matter.

<sup>3</sup> Thomas Richardson (1773-1835) lived at Sunderland. In 1799 he married Elizabeth Backhouse, of Darlington. He was acknowledged a Minister in 1814. He is to be distinguished from Thomas Richardson (1771-1853), of London and Great Ayton, financier and philanthropist.

<sup>4</sup> Darlington M.M. issued an interesting Testimony respecting Mary Brantingham (1751-1834). She was born of poor parents, and was never taught to write. In her youth " she was particularly fond of dancing

and singing." When about 23 she entered the family of a Friend and was greatly influenced for good. Before becoming a Friend she saw she must use the plain language and alter her dress "which were grievous trials." She married Hugh Brantingham and settled near the city of Durham, later removing to Stockton. "The care of a numerous offspring" required much of her time, but she paid several religious visits in the Northern Counties. She was a Minister about 55 years.

<sup>5</sup> Margaret Bragg (1761-1840) was the youngest daughter of Isaac and Rachel Wilson of Kendal. In 1790 she married Hadwen Bragg (1763-1820), draper, of Newcastle. "She was endowed with a very superior share of natural abilities and possessing an active mind she was induced to take part in the management of a variety of affairs beyond the generality of her sex" (Testimony). It would be interesting to know more of this line of service. A silhouette of M. Bragg is reproduced in *The Society of Friends in Newcastle*, 1899.

<sup>6</sup> Solomon Chapman (1750-1838) was born at Whitby and removed to Sunderland in 1768. In 1772 he married Jane Ogden (certificate in D). "This Solomon was a person of much consideration in the neighbourhood of Sunderland and a very stern Friend of the old School—a Minister somewhat formal and sententious in speech" (Beck's *Family Fragments* 1897, p. 47).

<sup>7</sup> Henry Frederick Smith ( -1862) was a son of the noted Minister and chemist, Frederick Smith (1757-1823), of London and Croydon. In 1804 he married Selve (Self—e) Pease (1781-1871). Their grandson was the Hebrew scholar, Samuel Rolles Driver (1846-1914). Joseph Foster states that H. F. Smith died in America (*Pease of Darlington*, 1891, p. 27). The school is described by William Hodgson, of Sheffield and Philadelphia, as "a collegiate school where the sons of Friends could have advantages of a good education without the exposure of University life" (*Letters and Memoirs*, 1886, p. 8). The school was removed into Essex, according to a circular, without date, mentioned in Joseph Smith's Supplementary Catalogue: "Smith, Henry Frederick, of Darlington—Circular addressed to Friends on the Removal of his Academy from Darlington to Wood House, near Little Ilford, Essex. 4to. No date."

<sup>8</sup> For Joseph Sams (1784-1860), schoolmaster and bookseller, see article in next volume.

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## John de Marsillac

See vols. xv, xvi, xviii, xix.

"9 mo. 18, 1795. I went yesterday to Philadelphia, and attended the meeting for sufferings, at which was John De Marselac, a Frenchman, who seems conscientiously concerned for the support of truth upon its right foundation."

Journal of William Blakey (c. 1738-1822), in Comly, *Misc.* iv. 123.